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ABSTRACT

It is noted that most bilingual and special migrant classrooms segregate children with different native languages despite the social disadvantages and the lower motivation for learning English which accrue as a result of such student grouping. This paper suggests administrative and instructional means for providing for these children within heterogeneous classes, and for the children who must move in and out of classes as their families move with the crops. (Author)

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PROVIDING FOR MOBILE POPULATIONS IN BILINGUAL AND MIGRANT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

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One of the major problems in special educational programs for students who learn English as a second language in the United States is the lack of continuity across regional boundaries--or even between schools in the same district, or grade levels within the same school. I consider myself an optimistic person by nature, but I would like to begin by citing a few disheartening personal experiences.

I began teaching in a rural district in California where children of migrant laborers enrolled during the fall grape and cotton harvests and returned in the spring to pick fruit. There was no "special" program for these children, and no teachers or supervisors trained in ESL methodology in my district. My own training in early childhood education was obviously inappropriate for a kindergarten class in which over half the children spoke no English at all. I asked for help from my county school consultant and was given a 700 word vocabulary list and two directives: 1) teach these words and then the children will be ready for first grade, and 2) don't let them speak

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any Spanish. The teachers and principal were genuinely concerned about the academic retardation of our Spanish-speaking students, but our landowning, taxpaying trustees would not approve a desk or textbooks for each child because "they'll be leaving anyway." Considering their existing tax burden, the view was partly one of self-preservation.

With state aid, many districts maintained pre-firsts[1],

[1]Special classes for students who have reached the normal age for first grade, but are not considered "ready". These students then enter first grade at least a year late. The "beginner class" maintained by Bureau of Indian Affairs schools is a comparable extra year of instruction.

supposedly a year for concentrated language learning and reading readiness before enrollment in a regular first grade class. These classes usually had a tape recorder and an overhead projector because ot the state funding, but the teachers were generally the least experienced in the school--those who had too little seniority to rate a "better" assignment. Even when there was a good teacher, the children were of course retarded a year in school, did not have English-speaking models in their peer group to learn from, and there was no motivation for the children to learn a new language to communicate with each other. This homogeneous grouping often extended upward through the grades, and observing children in the cafeterias and on the playgrounds convinced me that the social grouping

established by classroom assignment was usually maintained. Some states, including Texas, have separate migrant schools so that even the limited playground contact is eliminated.

It is ironic that the same federal government which has taken such strides in integrating black and white school populations is paying millions to initiate and maintain such segregation of the Mexican-American. Many of the segregated programs continue even if student progress is far below reasonable expectations. But the state of Texas alone is spending 15 million dollars this year on special migrant classes, and that is high motivation to keep any program going.

One of the most theoretically heartening developments in recent years has been the widespread implementation of bilingual education. In practice, however, I have observed even more segregated classes. Even when a few Anglo children are administratively included in such programs, I see them separated for most instructional purposes. And I see children who have mastered basic reading skills in Spanish repeat first grade when they must change schools, because they have not been taught to read in English.

I have promised to make some constructive suggestions for dealing with such problems of articulation, but I must admit my answers are far more tentative than when I first agreed to speak on this topic. When I began to

define the problems faced in the programs I contact, I found they are operating without testable hypotheses, and seemingly adhering to a brand of logic that did not make such testing necessary. "It makes sense to do what we have done previously because, in spite of its inadequacy, it works most of the time." And an extension of that, "What we've been doing is better than what we did before."

We have more of a choice than that! Not providing needed instruction for migrant children is not the only alternative to segregated schools. Having children of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds together does not imply teaching them all the same thing, or all in the same way. Great strides are being taken in providing for individual differences in the classroom, but we in TESOL are only mincing along in that very promising direction, if not actually dragging our heels.

May I first suggest that we take a more serious look at the potential contribution of educational methods courses to our field. Certainly a knowledge of language learning processes, contrastive structures, and other linguistic content is indispensable to teaching English as a second language. But there have been far-reaching developments in individualized instruction, team-teaching techniques, and other innovative procedures in recent years which may be valuable adjuncts to current language pedagogy. We should invite experts in these areas to

participate in our conferences, to consult in our programs, and to offer courses for our teacher candidates. I am not saying that they have pat answers to our problems. I am saying that answers are more likely to come from a broader perspective on teaching and diversified experiences and philosophies in education.

Next, we need financial assistance to meet the special instructional needs of non-English speaking children without the funding priorities and restrictions which make heterogeneous classes more of a burden to local taxpayers than segregated programs. In our part of the country, at least, if projects are funded on the basis of the average socio-economic status of the students' families, grants go to programs which exclude most Anglos on a de facto basis. The state supported kindergartens in Texas are a case in point. Because the initial priority for enrollment is given the Mexican-American or black child who does not speak standard English, we are embarking on another level of segregated education. Middle class Anglo children must go to private kindergartens. The dual system is realized even earlier in Head Start vs. private nursery schools.

Individualized instruction ideally involves accepting each child where he is when he enters a school, providing instructional material and techniques to meet his unique educational needs, and allowing him to progress as fast

as he can without pressure or frustration. Such a flexible program would not find the migrant child a problem because he may not arrive at school on time, attend regularly, or fit into one of the three reading groups. The child from a bilingual program who has begun reading in Spanish could continue developing those skills while a flexible reading program in English is added.

This ideal is not unapproachable, particularly in the light of monetary resources already available (through in need of some rechanneling).

We need a variety of hardware and software, and teachers trained to use them. We need learning centers with tape recorders, and projectors, and closed circuit TV. A multi-media project is now field-testing movies, tapes and film strips for teaching English and Spanish with accompanying programmed work sheets.[2]

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[2]A Title VII project of the Bilingual Demonstration and Dissemination Project, Bilingual Program Development Center, San Antonio, Texas.

An individual or small group of children can begin a sequence at any time and continue at different learning rates if such equipment is used properly. The cartridge tape-TV apparatus developed for the Gloria and David language materials[3] is designed for individual or small

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[3]Language Arts Associates, Austin, Texas.

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group listening and repetition, and other teaching machinery

would prove equally adaptable to meeting individual needs within a group and adjusting to partially migratory attendance patterns. We are talking about a lot of money, of course, and I would like to suggest ways to spend even more.

We need smaller classes if we expect teachers to individualize instruction, and we need adequate consultants or resource teachers available to offer help, guidance and direction for the varied learning problems, needs and interests children have.

Better communication is essential among school districts that share the same migrant students. There is, for instance, a sizeable group that winters in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, spends the spring in the San Joaquin Valley of California (although often moving within the valley two or three times), travels up the coast to Oregon, Washington, or into Idaho for the summer, back through California in the fall, and "home" to Texas by Thanksgiving or soon after. Cooperative textbook adoptions among these districts would help, particularly in reading, and providing cumulative records that would tell the next teacher what material has been completed is an obvious need. I do not know of any computer which stores profile data on migrant students, but this might be a reasonable way to let teachers know where and what to begin teaching with minimal time loss. On the child's exit from that

school, a revised card could be sent back to the centralized location and the current information retrieved by the next teacher. Computerized materials resource centers are already a reality, and we need those, too.

I am still very optimistic about bilingual education. Its primary problem in articulation comes more from an insufficient number of bilingual programs than any other single cause. It is very difficult for any student to transfer between bilingual and monolingual programs, at least until reading is well established in both languages. The only solution I see is to make bilingual education available in <u>all</u> school districts where there are students who learn English as a second language.

For both social and academic reasons, these programs should also include native English-speaking students learning a second language, such as Spanish. Since reading should be introduced in the dominant language, grouping for that subject will be necessary (unless we are attaining our ideal of individualized instruction), and also for a brief period a day for direct second language instruction, including pattern drills, etc.

There is no need in the early grades to separate children according to language dominance for science, social studies, or any other subjects. I would suggest teaching math in English and social studies and science in the other language. The Spanish vocabulary needed

for these subjects, for instance, can be presented to English-dominant children in their Spanish-as-a-second-language period. If extensive visual aids and varied examples are used, even I can follow and learn from lessons conducted in Spanish or Navajo. There are at least two reasons for not presenting the same lessons in the native language and in translation--it is a waste of time, and much of the motivation for learning the second language is lost. The availability of instructional material in each language will of course influence the linguistic division.

Computational skills should be developed in English because students continue to perform basic mathematical processes in the language in which they first learned them and more advanced courses in mathematics will probably require the use of English. For the same reasons, school districts should have math texts available in other languages for students who transfer in with basic skills already established.

Articulation between grade levels in bilingual programs is raising questions as some Title VII projects are now preparing for grade three or beyond. These are largely questions of attitude and philosophy. If the purpose of a bilingual program in a district is to expedite the rapid acculturation of minority groups,[4] then the

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[4]A. Bruce Gaarder, "Organization of the Bilingual School." The Journal of Social Issues, 23 (April, 1967), 110-20.

native language can be dropped as soon as students can be converted from one linguistic medium to another.

If the purpose of a bilingual program is to make children bilingual, then the native language is never replaced, but continues as a viable channel for both learning and self-expression.

I began this paper by citing negative experiences which lend caution to my perception of our special programs for linguistically different learners, and which strongly influence the suggestions I have made for attacking our problems of articulation.

My most positive experience has been the widespread realization among educators that the academic failure of children is not necessarily the failure of children to learn, but may be the failure of the school to teach. We who walk the bridge between linguistics and curriculum development accept this as both a challenge and a mandate to continue our search for answers.